



How can tobacco companies freely sell and promote an addictive product that causes hundreds of thousands of deaths each year? With the help of Congress and the media...

Cigarette Makers Are Getting Away With Murder!

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KEN CUMMINS

WHEN EVIDENCE linking cigarette smoking and lung cancer began piling up during the 1950s, the cigarette industry quickly took the offensive. Ads claimed that scientifically designed filters would dramatically reduce the amount of nicotine and tars inhaled when smoking. Some advertising suggested that filtered cigarettes actually protected one's health. "Made from a material used to purify air in atomic-energy plants," boasted the ads for Kent's Micronite filter.

In the 1960s and 1970s, when an avalanche of studies confirmed the link with lung cancer and identified cigarettes as a major cause of heart disease, emphysema and stroke, the government responded by requiring health warnings on cigarette packs and banning cigarette advertising on television and radio. But the tobacco industry's scientists and advertising executives quickly concocted another gimmick to fend off the health scare: the low-tar cigarette.

Today, however, with cigarette use being linked to even more health problems (recently to uterine cancer and birth-weight deficiencies), and with smoking being prohibited in more and more public places (shopping malls, airports and workplaces), the tobacco industry is on the defensive—a defensiveness perhaps best illustrated by a current advertising campaign by the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. The company's ads call for an "open debate" on the health effect of smoking, alleging that the link between cigarettes and disease is not conclusive.

The ads are right in one respect: it is time for an open debate on smoking, which many have called the nation's No. 1 health problem. But the question shouldn't be whether cigarettes are harmful; the evidence that smoking causes at least 340,000 premature deaths a year is conclusive. The debate instead should center on why the tobacco industry still enjoys virtual

carte blanche to promote and sell a lethal product.

Indeed, compared with the treatment afforded other dangerous substances, the latitude given cigarettes is extraordinary. When a pesticide is suspected of causing cancer—EDB (ethylene dibromide) is a recent case in point—the substance is often banned outright. When it was reported to the FDA that 32 people had died after taking Eli Lilly and Company's Oralflex, Lilly withdrew the drug from the market.

Hooking Youth. The nation's cigarette makers are not complacent, though the threat to their basic interests so far is small. Unable to blunt the latest wave of health concern with any new technological gimmicks to make smoking "safer," the manufacturers have designed some new strategies to bolster sagging sales—strategies that brazenly contradict their past pledges. For example, in 1964 the industry voluntarily agreed that, effective January 1965, its advertising would not show "as a smoker any person well known as being, or having been, an athlete" or anyone "participating in, or obviously having just participated in, physical activity requiring stamina or athletic conditioning beyond that of normal recreation." Nor would brand ads suggest that "smoking is essential to social prominence, distinction, success or sexual attraction."

Think about the cigarette ads you've seen lately. The ballerina

sitting on the floor, holding a Vantage Ultra Light; the snow skier in the Bright ad; the mountain climber in the Camel Lights; the rugged Marlboro man chasing a stray steer. Then there are the brands such as Players, Sterling and Barclay that are promoted as status symbols. So much for promises.

There's also the industry's strategy of sponsoring sports, entertainment and cultural events that link smoking with athletic and artistic endeavors. R. J. Reynolds sponsors the Camel Sprint Series for speed skiing, the Winston Cup Grand National Series for stock-car racing and various music concerts. Philip Morris U.S.A. reportedly pours in over \$14 million a year just for its Virginia Slims Championship Series tennis tournaments. Liggett & Myers even supports the Children's Cancer Classic Celebrity Golf Tournament!

Other merchandising activities seem to be aimed at children and teen-agers, such as the sale of toys and candy cigarettes bearing trademarks of familiar cigarette brands. And Philip Morris neither confirms nor denies rumors that it arranged to feature its Marlboro cigarettes in *Superman II*, in which the logo appears about 20 times.

Using such subtle techniques, cigarette advertising has even returned to the very medium from which it was banned in 1971: television. "When was the last time you watched a football or baseball game on TV without seeing a Marlboro ad?" comments Matthew Myers of

the Coalition on Smoking or Health. "They're right next to the scoreboard in nearly every NFL city."

The Tobacco Institute steadfastly denies that industry advertising targets young people. Yet most smokers take up the habit in their teens and then can't stop. And the industry's future growth obviously depends on teen-agers' and young adults' getting hooked.

Power Base. How has the cigarette industry managed to get away with flagrant misrepresentations and violations of its own advertising code? Quite simply, tobacco products are at the heart of a \$60-billion-a-year industry, which amounts to 2.5 percent of the gross national product and considerable economic clout. The industry also has powerful friends in two important places: Congress and the media.

Its most potent allies have been its advocates in Congress, few in number but well-placed. The tobacco lobby nurtures the rise of sympathetic Congressmen—usually from the top tobacco-growing states of Kentucky and North Carolina—into the chairmanships of key committees. For example, when Wendell Ford (D., Ky.) was elected to the Senate in 1974, former Kentucky Sen. Earle Clements, a past president of the Tobacco Institute, helped secure Ford's appointment to the Senate Commerce (now Commerce, Science and Transportation) Committee, which is a major battleground for cigarette legislation; it also has oversight responsi-

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bilities for the Federal Trade Commission. Ford quickly moved up to chair the Consumer Subcommittee, a post he used until 1981 to frustrate efforts to put stronger health-warning labels on cigarettes.

From its power base on Capitol Hill, the industry has been able to squelch nearly all federal regulation of cigarettes. At present, only the FTC has any real jurisdiction over cigarette manufacturers, and all it can do is enforce the law on the content of cigarette advertising, including the requirement that there be a health warning.

A brief look at the federal agencies that *could* regulate cigarettes, if given the authority, is revealing. One is the Consumer Product Safety Commission. (The dangers of cigarettes go far beyond health; they are the leading cause of deaths by fire in the home.) In 1974 a petition was filed with the CPSC to set maximum tar levels. But the commission maintained it did not have jurisdiction. A federal judge then ruled that the agency *did* have this authority, but the Senate Commerce Committee quickly amended the Federal Hazardous Substances Act to strip the CPSC of any jurisdiction over cigarettes.

The federal agency most appropriate for regulating cigarettes is the Food and Drug Administration. But the FDA has argued that it has no authority since cigarettes are not classified as a drug—despite the death toll from a product that is probably several times greater than

that from all the substances the FDA *does* regulate.

It would, of course, be unrealistic to expect Congress to ban cigarettes; enforcing that law would prove as impossible as Prohibition. A compromise bill in Congress would mandate stiffer health warnings on cigarette packages and advertisements—stronger than the rather lame "The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health." The new, more conspicuous messages would be headlined "SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING," and would target specific health risks, such as lung cancer, heart disease, pregnancy complications and the fact that cigarette smoke contains carbon monoxide. But a lot more remains to be done about cigarette advertising itself.

For example, Congress could make mandatory the industry's voluntary guidelines on cigarette advertising. Cigarettes could be forced to pay a fairer share of the havoc they wreak on the nation's health, by hefty taxes for Medicare. Congress could also outlaw cigarettes in vending machines to help prevent sales to minors. And it could extend the 1971 ban on television and radio advertising to newspapers, magazines and billboards.

Normal Business. Still, Congress isn't the only institution responsible for allowing cigarettes to keep on exacting their staggering toll. The owners of the nation's newspapers, magazines and billboards also con-

READER'S DIGEST

tinue to give cigarette manufacturers virtually unlimited access to advertise and promote their product.

The cigarette industry spends \$1.5 billion a year to promote its products and advertise in magazines, newspapers and on billboards. This is big money—so big that it can't help but affect the behavior of publishers. The American Council on Science and Health has compared the amount of coverage magazines give to smoking and health issues with their dependence on cigarette ads for revenue. The Council's 1982 survey, for instance, revealed that, between 1972 and 1981, *Redbook*, where 16 percent of ad revenues came from cigarette ads, and *Ms.*, where the figure was about 14 percent, didn't publish a single article on the hazards of smoking. Nor have they in the years since 1981. This is striking when one considers the dramatic increase in lung cancer among women. *Cosmopolitan* and *Psychology Today*, which annually earn about \$7 million and \$1.5 million, respectively, from cigarette ads, have discussed smoking in some articles but have refused to run an ad for a national chain of anti-smoking clinics.

Some newspapers and magazines are even making a special effort to ensure that their readers get the tobacco industry's story. Along with *Time* magazine, the

New York *Times* runs ads in the *U.S. Tobacco and Candy Journal* to solicit more cigarette advertising.

This is not to single out these publications; their approach is the norm in the journalism business. All but a handful of newspapers and major magazines accept cigarette ads. And almost none of these publications attempt to hold the industry to its own "voluntary guidelines" against advertising that associates smoking with health, beauty, success and athletic ability.

To be sure, newspaper and magazine publishers could adopt their own "voluntary guidelines" enforcing those of the cigarette makers. But so far, that hasn't happened.

THE MORAL IMPERATIVE of doing everything possible to reduce the staggering toll from cigarette smoking may be felt someday in the executive boardrooms of the nation's publishing media. Obviously fearful of that possibility, the tobacco industry has redoubled its efforts in Congress and the media to tell its side of the story. As a result, R. J. Reynolds and its compatriots are continuing to stifle the "open debate" that should be raging right now about how to deal with America's No. 1 public-health problem.

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IF ALL THE CARS in the United States were placed end to end, it would probably be Labor Day weekend.

—Doug Larson, United Feature Syndicate



LIFE IN THESE UNITED STATES

WE HAVE BEEN BUILDING our house for the last five years. One day a carpenter friend came by to tell my husband how to install stairs from the main landing to the second floor. As the men stood in the kitchen talking, I baked a cake and began dinner.

After they wandered into the family room to look at our new home computer, I went by them with a load of laundry, and then proceeded to hang screens. By the time I got outside to mow the lawn, they were walking toward our friend's truck. Ten minutes later the lawn mower quit, and I interrupted their conversation to ask my husband for help.

Our friend looked at my husband sympathetically. "Ain't that just the way it always is, Tom," he moaned. "A man's work is never done!"

—JUDITH A. FRAWLEY (Rochester, Minn.)

WHEN WE GO OUT TO EAT with our small son, we usually end up at a fast-food restaurant. As I watched my wife eat still another hamburger, I told her to get a baby-sitter for the next Saturday because the two of us were going out for a night on the town.

Saturday night came, and we eagerly got into the car. "Where do you want to go?" I asked her. "Just name

the restaurant and we'll wine and dine."
"It really doesn't matter," she replied. "Just as long as I don't have to unwrap my food."

—PETER ROMANI (Fredericksburg, Va.)

EACH YEAR our town holds a fall festival, complete with arts-and-crafts displays, concession stands and entertainment. The biggest attraction is always the flea market, where one can find anything from antiques to potted plants. As I struggled to get through the large crowd, I noticed an elderly woman who was moving briskly along as a path magically opened up in front of her.

When I finally got close enough, I discovered her secret. Gingerly—at arm's length—she was carrying the most vicious-looking cactus plant I have ever seen.

—P. J. DILL (Atlanta, Ind.)

A FRIEND AND I had joined a Weight Watchers group. At the first meeting, the lecturer asked members which food or department at the supermarket was the most tempting to them. One man confessed that Chinese egg rolls were his greatest weakness, and a woman said she found it almost impossible to resist any chocolate.

Finally it was my friend's turn. Taking a deep breath, she announced, "Aisles two, three, four and five."

—KATHRYN T. LEBES (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.)

AT THE AGE OF 19, my mother married a widower with five children. They then had ten children of their own. One day I recalled how naïve I had